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ADVOCATE OF PEACE.

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WAR AND CHRISTIANITY.

BY SAMUEL E. COUES, PORTSMOUTH, N. H.

POSITION OF THE SOCIETY.

THE American Peace Society assumes as its position, that international war is opposed to the spirit of Christ, is forbidden by the Gospel, and that it can never be waged without a violation of the commands of the Prince of Peace. We are separated from the world so far as this, the fundamental article of our association, will separate us. Whatever may be the opinions of individuals among us, we do not, as a Society, concern ourselves with the question of the right of private or personal self-defence, nor do we advocate any change of the penal code. We are not opposed to the government of the country, nor in any way do we place ourselves in an attitude of defiance to constituted authorities. But we hold fast to our rights and duties as Christians; we profess a paramount allegiance to God; we believe that no act of our rulers, that no posture of this nation, or of any other nation, can repeal the law which demands of us love to our enemies, so as to justify us in taking the property and lives of the people of other lands. We do therefore no more or less than place ourselves on the "Thus saith the Lord."

We believe that this is a high and holy position, and we

have come up to it, not in a moment of fitful enthusiasm, but calmly, resolutely, from the deliberate convictions of our minds. We are aware of all the consequences of this position. We have surveyed the whole ground. We know the strength of prejudice which bears against us. We are prepared to meet the tide of popular opinion. We are not dismayed when many, high in church and state, look coldly upon us. It is not our numbers which gives us this confidence, though the friends of Peace are increasing all over the world; nor our talents, though many of the greatest minds of the age are with us. Our success will be because we are right, because we are co-workers with God in the redemption of the world, because we are collected under the banner of the cross, because God hath said that the time shall come when the nations shall learn war no more for ever; because "it is finished," said Jesus, when he gave up his life for his enemies. And angels and archangels shall re-echo the cry, "it is finished," when men shall so partake of the spirit of Christ, as to be willing to die for those who hate and persecute them; and not until then will our Lord's kingdom come, and the reign of righteousness be established over the whole earth!

I am addressing a Christian audience. Have you not chosen the Prince of Peace for your leader? Does he authorize you to fight, or to give your countenance to the fight? Will he hold you justified in destroying, for your own good, or for your country's good, the stranger of another land? There should be no strangers, nor foreigners, nor aliens to the Christian. It matters not under what government a man is born, or where he dwells; he is our brother; he is under the same roof—the canopy of the sky; he is a member of the one household of God which takes in the whole world. The church of Christ is also the church universal; it recognizes no national line as a partition wall; it takes to its bosom the Christian of every country and every clime; it embraces all who worship the true God through Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world. Ye are indeed brethren, the children of one Father. The Christian warrior, then, if a Christian can be a warrior, fights with a brother, with one subject to the same laws, under the same government as he himself is. He can sit at the Lord's table, eat of the bread, emblem of his body

broken for him, drink of the wine, emblem of the blood shed for the remission of sin, enjoy sweet communion with his brother; then, before the taste of the consecrated elements has passed away, drive the steel into his brother's heart, and immediately visit the widow and the fatherless, lifting up the hands of the murderer in prayer for her whose husband he has slain, or lay them, yet reeking with a father's blood, upon the orphan's head!

Such it is in effect, for a Christian to fight; as such must it appear to the eye of God. We separate the anthem of praise from the shout of victory; the prayer, Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us, from the noise of the battle; the worship of the Prince of Peace, and the garments rolled in blood, strike not our minds at once. Yet to our Father in heaven, to whom time and distance are nothing, who seeth the end from the beginning, before whom the whole life is spread out, these things are blended together.

War is either right or it is wrong. It is either permitted or forbidden. It may be waged "with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds, with all our strength," or it must be abandoned by the Christian. There is no middle ground, no half-way position. Either the blessing of God can rest on the battle-field, or we must come up to the rescue of our faith from this pollution of blood. There is, we repeat it, no half-way vindication of national war: it is to be baptized of Christianity, adopted of her, it accords with her character, or it must be opposed by every one bearing the name of Christ.

OBJECTIONS—THE PRINCIPLES OF PEACE UNFITTED FOR THE PRESENT STATE OF THE WORLD.

Let us examine some of the objections which have been urged against our position.

It has been said often, and we continue to hear it, even from the lips of the Christian, that the position of this Society is too high, that though the principles we profess are unquestionably the Christian principles, they are too pure for adoption, surrounded as we are by the selfish and the contentious. Wait, it is said, for the millennium! Your faith is fitted for beings of a higher order than men; it accords better with

the purity of the angels of heaven. What an admission for our encouragement is there in this very objection! Advocate of Peace, be of good cheer! It is much for you that your position is thus holy. Let the doctrine of a self-sacrificing love to man be wrought into your heart; it will be health to your soul; and though no ear may listen when you speak of that which gives you sympathy with Heaven itself, it will lift you up, it will cause you to breathe an atmosphere purified of the corruptions of a fighting world.

Our Saviour did not bend the standard of duty so as to meet with the notions of worldly expediency. The measure of duty—the Christian code of morals—is held up, fixed, unyielding, determinate, that it may convict the world of sin. The bread of life is not adulterated so that it may suit the taste of a perverse generation. Remember the words of Jesus, “It hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you. Your Father maketh the sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

Is this more fitted for earth, than our almost needless commentary on these blessed words, when we say that it is opposed to the spirit of Christ, for Christians to rend and destroy one another in the waging of international war?

PEACE INCONSISTENT WITH GOVERNMENT.

The position of this Society is further assailed upon this ground. The government of the country is a Christian institution; it is a minister of good; it is a terror to evil doers; it preserves the rights of the people, their property, and their lives. We should respect “the powers that be,” and as the prop and support of government is the sword, Christians are justified in using the sword. If the Peace principles were to prevail, if no Christian would fight, government, an institution consecrated by Christianity, would be weakened, if not altogether overthrown. We state this objection as it came from the lips of a minister of the Gospel, in a sermon defensive of war.

If we are to uphold our government right or wrong, if we

are to give it our sanction, alike when its operation is for good, and when it outrages the principles of Christianity, we undermine the very foundation of morals, and overthrow the partition wall between the right and the wrong. It would be the bringing of the Gospel into trial by courts of law, or by the cabinet councils, or rather it would be the making of human tribunals to stand in the place of revealed truth.

Say, for instance, the revenue derived from the importation and distillation of alcohol is needed for the support of "the powers that be;" let, then, no one advocate the disuse of that which intoxicates, or speak one word for temperance, for, traitor-like, he would weaken the government of his country! Again; slavery makes a part of our present social compact; the chain which binds the African is supposed to be, and actually is, the bond which keeps together the north and the south; the "peculiar institution" gives form, and expression, and character, at home and abroad, to our political institutions. Let no man remember the slave as bound with him; let no lip utter aught of human brotherhood, lest we weaken this minister of good, this terror to evil doers!

A foreign military officer, high in rank, while travelling through a part of New England, observed that "this country could not be strong in war. The people were too much educated, they were too independent, too happy, to be made soldiers of." Poverty to the borders of starvation is the most successful recruiting officer. Christian, do not attempt to stem the tide of intemperance, do not contend against those vices which impoverish and degrade the people, do not strive to make your countrymen happy and prosperous, virtuous and intelligent, lest you spoil them for soldiers. Do not seek to make them religious, for as Wellington observed, "a man of keen religious sense has no business in the ranks of the army." Dissolve your associations for reform: disband the companies of Christian philanthropists that now are gathering together for mutual sympathy and aid. They are unpatriotic, all of them; like the American Peace Society, they have for their object the dissemination of principles which will weaken the military strength of the country. Would you close your Bible altogether, if it weakened your country in war? As you answer this question, so will you answer these objections to the principles of peace.

If our government be a Christian institution, how can we better manifest our respect for it, than by filling our hearts with the spirit of Christ? There are no incompatible duties enjoined by the Gospel. To make ourselves temples for the Holy Ghost, and to give a hearty support to Christian institutions, is no separate and conflicting work. This government is a Christian institution so far as it guards the property, the lives, the rights of the people. But the character of our government rests on the character of the people. By elevating them, by purifying their morals, by leading them to a higher standard, you do, in fact, yield the most efficient support to a Christian government. If, therefore, you would uphold it, spread over the land the pure principles of Christianity, whether or not they seem to weaken the powers that be. We must not try our principles by their direct action on government, but by their action on the character of the people. For on this character the preservation of every good institution, the permanence of every social compact, the rights of every individual, ultimately rest.

Besides this, it is, to say the least, very inconclusive reasoning to demand for our government, because it is a Christian institution, military strength to enable it to contend with other governments, equally Christian institutions,—to draw from the necessity of law, order, and justice among ourselves, a right to establish the rule of brute force over the world,—a rule which repeals all law, and measures the rights of man by his ability to maintain them with the sword. How absurd to draw from the necessity of law to regulate the intercourse of the citizens of any country, the conclusion, that Christianity should abandon her post, as the lawgiver of the world, withdraw her sanctions, repeal her statutes, so that the nations may be justified in mutual slaughter, whenever it may please their rulers to embark in the desolations of war.

THE PLEA OF NECESSITY.

The next objection to the principles of our Society is but a branch of the preceding one. Self-defence is a Christian right, and we are not only allowed to defend ourselves, but it is a Christian duty to defend others. As a nation, we are bound together for this mutual defence. We depend upon others for our safety, others depend upon us; nor can we give or receive this protection but by the sword.

The sword, the very instrument of destruction, the protection of a nation! A sure protection indeed, when the pointing it towards others invariably brings its point to our own bosom! The sword the only arbiter of justice! A righteous judge indeed, for it is used equally by both contending parties! The sword our only sure defence against the selfish and violent, when the selfish and violent wield it with equal strength with ourselves! Do we not forget, too, that the sword should be taken from our hands for this very reason—the safety of others; that we should be disarmed that others may live in peace. It is no more safe in our hands than in the hands of other nations. We wield it with no more wisdom than they. We are not one whit less selfish—less belligerent than they. The very legislators who are to decide the question of its use, cannot assemble without brawls, and fightings, and bloodshed, in the very capitol.

Will you say that it is the fear of war which restrains the nations from mutual injury,—that if other nations did not dread our declaration of war, they would encroach upon us, injure our country, and despoil the land,—that we are safe only as our enemies dread our attack?—that it is the sword in the scabbard ready for use which gives our nation its safety?—that the threatening attitude, the preparation for war in peace is our national shield? Why, it is the sword in the scabbard, it is the threatening attitude, the preparation for conflict, which creates the danger. This reliance on the sword is the evil against which we contend. In proportion to this reliance, is the danger. Nations confronting each other with their armaments are never safe. The veriest accidents tend to embroil them in war. Those nations which have been most prepared for war, have invariably suffered the most from war, verifying the words of our Saviour, “they that take the sword shall perish by the sword.”

Some years since, in one of our Southern States, the practice of carrying concealed weapons became common among the people. No one supposed he was safe unless he had about him, the pistol or the bowie-knife—the instruments of death to others, and of defence and safety to himself. The result was, continual bloodshed. No man’s life was safe. Murder became so prevalent as to excite the attention of the legislature. They passed a law, punishing him who carried these

weapons on his person. The legislature thus took away the means of defence—as they were termed—and the effusion of blood was stopped.

It is so with the nations. There has been continual warfare. The world has never been at peace. Christianity, the lawgiver of the world, would open the path to Peace and safety by the disarming of the nations. She would stop the effusion of blood by throwing away the sword. But, alas! men have not confidence in her teachings. They fear to obey her laws. They cling to the instruments of death as the means of safety, and they have dearly paid the penalty of disobedience.

What has the sword done for us as a nation? What for our freedom? For very many years, say one-seventh of the time, we have groaned under the harsh despotism of war—the very worst of despotisms. One-sixth of our whole population are abject slaves; nor have Americans emancipated themselves from the fear of the sword, from faction and riot, from turbulence and popular commotion. They have never risen up to the liberty of the children of God.

What has the sword done for the protection of property in this nation? We have squandered in war more than eight hundred millions of dollars. Add to this the loss of the productive labor of the fighting men, the idleness and waste of time, the captured property, the breaking up of commerce, and it sounds like irony to speak of the preservation of property by the very process which of itself annihilates the greater part of the nation's property, and destroys the morals and industry on which only can national wealth be founded.

What has the sword done for the preservation of life to this nation? Estimate the number of the slain in the Indian wars, in the French war, in the war of the Revolution, in the last war with England,—bring to mind the number of those who perished on the sea and on the land, upon our lakes and our rivers, on our northern frontier, and on our southern boundary, on the long Atlantic coast, in the western wilderness, in the heart of the country, and all over its broad surface;—add to these, the victims of the prison-ships, and of the hospitals,—those who died from hunger and cold, from hardship and exposure, from wounds and mutilations, from the vices and pollutions of the camp. Bring all these corpses

together before the mind, as if the countless multitude lay on some vast plain ; look steadfastly for a moment on this sea of the dead ; survey this mass of mutilated, of crushed, of trampled bodies—the results of your national wars—and then speak to me, if you can, of the protection of life by the sword !

But, look ! there is another sea of the dead—another multitude of witnesses, countless as the leaves of the forest, which speak against us—the collected corpses of those whom Americans have slain. Each of these, too, was a man, a brother, a child of God, whose very hairs were numbered. And though they have all passed away for ever from the earth, though their names are forgotten, each one now liveth and standeth before God, as a witness of the desolation and ruin, of the torture and misery, which arise from the abandonment of the principles of the Prince of Peace. But further ; what is the life of the body, compared with the life of the soul ? What is the pain of a violent death, compared with the agony of unrepented sin ? Each one of these murdered millions stands before the judgment seat ! Is the army the school of Christ ? Do men's souls go up to heaven pure and undefiled, from the pollutions of the camp ? Are they taught to love God whom they have not seen, while engaged in destroying their brethren whom they have seen ? Can they join harmoniously in the praise of God as redeemed spirits, who have left their bodies linked together on earth in the death-grapple ?

And can all this have been without a load of crime, fastening not indeed on the soldier,—the mere instrument of war, often as little accountable as the sword he uses,—but resting somewhere—on some souls ? We cannot trace out the guilty ones. God can, and to him the blood of our murdered brethren cries out from the ground ! O, there is a vast weight of guilt, attaching somewhere, for this horrid butchery ! Let us each see to it that for the time to come we clear our skirts of our brother's blood. Let him beware, who justifies murder, whenever it is said over the death-struggle, “it is for the country's good.”

Defence of our country—of our friends—of our families—of our brethren ! Truly, this is a Christian duty ; and we call upon all to discharge this duty by opposing the spirit of war,—by spreading the peaceful doctrines of Him who spake

as never man spake. That men may lead quiet and peaceful lives in their happy homes, are we associated together in the cause of Peace. It is for this that we would disarm the nations, that we would imbue men once again with their natural repugnance to the shedding of blood, which the war spirit has overcome. It is for this we would re-create in the hearts of men a reverence for life, the gift of God, which the frequent battle has destroyed. It is for this—the general safety, that we ask men to lay down their arms, strip themselves of the gaudy trappings of the soldier, give up their proud, boastful, self-confident bearing, clothe themselves in the garb of humility, assume the child-like, heavenly frame of mind, speaking in the kindness of the eye, lighting up the countenance with the smile of benevolence, causing the words of kindness to flow from the lips. Then war no more shall desolate the earth, for there will be faith in Jesus. The sun of righteousness, shining upon the world's true interest, shall form the bow of promise across the arch of heaven, as the sign of the safety of the nations, and of the peace of the world. The world in peace! an object worthy of God manifested in the flesh!

But,—we repeat the idea,—that which is destructive to life, is not the preserver of life; that which is the instrument of the slavery and degradation of the people all over the world, is not the instrument of freedom and happiness. But even if we are wrong, even if life would not be altogether safe from the abandonment of the sword, if our principles expose the nations to loss, let the loss come. If blood must flow as the price of safety to others, let it flow,—but as it flowed from the side of Jesus, willingly, for the good of the world! The martyr spirit is more Christian-like than the heroic; if, therefore, blood must be shed, let it not be that of hireling soldiers, ready to die for their pay and their rations, but from the Christian, whose glorious privilege it is to sacrifice himself in defence of the principles of the Gospel. Away with the sword from our hands, if its use accords not with these principles. Shall armies of hundreds of thousands be found ready to peril their lives for their country, and their pay, and shall the Christian blench and tremble at a less danger, which may arise from adherence to his faith?